

A
DISPASSIONATE ADDRESS
TO THE
SUBJECTS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN.

DICTIONARY

OF THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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A

DISPASSIONATE ADDRESS

TO THE

SUBJECTS

OF

GREAT BRITAIN.

By the Rev. EDWARD BARRY, M.D.

"Be calm in arguing, for Fierceness makes Error & Fault."

"Amicus Plato, Amicus Socrates, sed magis Amica est Veritas."

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DISPASSIONATE ADDRESS, &c.

THE proofs are too many and notorious to justify the trite remark, that political and religious contentions are of all others to be the most dreaded.

Candour and forbearance, which protect enquiries of less importance from assault and violence, are seldom suffered

to accompany these ; it is, however, a melancholy reflection, that subjects of such magnitude and excellence should seem to suffer in the disgrace of their intemperate advocates. But though amusing as these misfortunes may be to the prowling sceptic, or the objects of the unfair historian, honest and enlightened minds will ever save the principle from the opprobrium of the measure.

The experience of all ages, and nations hath held out a fatal lesson to mankind that extremes are dangerous ; nor are we wanting in modern examples most painfully to teach us that they terminate in riot, barbarities, and murder ! The moderate man in party, though coveted

veted by every one, is scarcely known beyond the name; for, in truth, the various demagogues of political faction have grown of late by far too numerous and too headstrong to yield any longer subjection to the calm appeal of reason, or the sober energy of debate! In this contrasted and very dangerous posture of political creeds, the amicable intentions of a moderator may be well received; and I offer such an hope as the true apology for taking upon myself so pleasing an office, and will endeavour with a concise and fair representation of the complaints on both sides, to propose some few ideas of mutual redress, and thus shall presume to have ac-

quitted myself not altogether unworthy of so good an undertaking.

Ever since the first struggles of a neighbouring kingdom to shake off the yoke of regal despotism, to the present moment of its republican establishment, the people of this country, during that tedious space, have not been indifferent spectators of so interesting a scene, but have sedulously watched its progress and completion with a tumult of various sentiments, which, in their different turns, have been goaded on to action, by the extravagant theories of despotic and democratic writers. The question of right and wrong has therefore, for this reason, been no longer confined within
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the Gallic domains, but has subjected to much scrutiny the freedom and purity of our own constitution.

These unrestrained enquiries have been considered by the legislator, as of too mischievous a tendency, both in cause and consequence, to the interests of a peaceable government, to be longer endured.

The alarm bell of state has, therefore, by proclamations and other exertions, announced her danger! immediately almost on hearing this, addresses of enthusiastic loyalty, from nearly all the cities, towns, and villages of England, fled to her relief; and by professing her *perfections*, have so far relieved

relieved the panic. To these auxiliaries, associations have as lavishly been formed, with avowed resentment against all those who, by writing or speaking, should in future arraign the excellence of the British constitution.

But this combined assumption of individual authority has been considered by not a few, and perhaps not without reason, as favouring by far of too unconstitutional a temper to be quietly passed over, and there is reason to believe has only served to aggravate men to do what *they dared to do!* Hence it is that the liberty of the press, and the freedom of political discussions, have ever since that time been more ably and roundly

roundly asserted than ever, and the power as well as the principles of such associations have been together censured and set at nought*. To what degree of information, or with what extent of freedom it is commendable, in those under the subjection of a state, to analyze its constituent parts, is matter by much too intricate for sudden determination.

The renowned Queen Elizabeth directed even her parliaments to abstain from discoursing on state affairs; and her successor, James the First, asserted

* Vide Mr. Erskine's Speech at the Crown and Anchor.

“ that

“that as it was *Atheism* and *blasphemy* in a creature to dispute what the Deity may do, so it was presumption and sedition in a subject to dispute what a King might do in the height of his power.”

But that profound lawyer, Sir William Blackstone, very clearly expresses himself of a different mind. “There

cannot be,” he says, “a stronger proof of that genuine freedom, which is the boast of this age and country, than the power of discussing and examining, with decency and respect, the limits of the King’s prerogative*.” Whoever

therefore forbids, or opposes, that legal

* Vide Blackstone’s Commentaries.

right,

right, must, according to the opinion of this able judge, act unconstitutionally. And it is equally plain, that whoever exceeds or *abuses* that right, is amenable to the established laws. And as the executive guardians of those laws have in themselves sufficient strength and discernment to apply them seasonably, so they likewise appear to be the only delegated and fit agents of their constitutional salutary operation. But while for these reasons disapproving of such associations, it is but just to remark, at the same time, that the zeal they have manifested for the public good, however unadvisable at other times,

times, yet, under the special circumstances which quickened it, might be erring more on the right side than the wrong one.

To give and take is an adage much recommended in all points of doubtful dispute, but too contemptuously is it listened to, in themes so uncertain, so irritable, and so peculiarly attractive of discord as the present.

Beauties and deformities are to be noticed in all the different governments on earth, of whatever kind or sort; and in one thing we are all pretty well agreed, that our own is the best. Despotism and republicanism are the miserable extremes! In the happy land on which Englishmen tread, few, to its honour

honour, are the advocates of the first, and perhaps fewer still would they themselves be, if doomed to feel what it really was; but many are they, who by no means think so unfavourably of the last*. Elective monarchies, with all the specious arguments that may be reasonably urged in their support, are yet too pregnant with fatal jealousy for practical approbation†.

* The celebrated republics of antiquity are those of Athens, Sparta, Rome, and Carthage;—the Venetians and Genoese call their states republic, but their government is said to be apparently oligarchic. Holland, which is composed of about fifty republics, all different from one another, may be considered as a confederate republic.

† Such as were in imperial Rome, but more modern proofs of it may be gathered from the elections of Poland and Germany.

The superior excellence of the British constitution, in KING, *Lords*, and *Commons*, is very ably defined to be like
 “ three distinct powers in mechanics,
 “ which jointly impel the machine of
 “ government different to what either
 “ acting by itself would have done, but
 “ at the same time in a direction parta-
 “ king of each, and formed out of all
 “ which constitutes the true line of
 “ the liberty and the happiness of the
 “ community.” Of so well organized
 a constitution as this, Englishmen do
 well to be tenacious; but inasmuch as
 perfection is not the lot of any human
 establishment, we must expect to meet
 with blemishes in our own, but they are

not

not so grievous as to become intolerable, nor are they so trivial as to pardon disregard ; and experience, which whispers that delays are dangerous, ought seriously to be attended to when it can ; lest, peradventure, the moment should distress us when it cannot. To cull out the best passages of our constitution, and advertise them to the world, as arguments of its purity, and in haughty reply to all intreaties of amendment, is equally as unfair a suppression of the truth, and the whole truth, and may sooner or later be as pernicious in consequence as the bare representation of its defects, without the candour to counterbalance against those its greater excellencies ; for thus it is left to

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the antagonist to take what advantage he pleases of these artful omissions, and represent them in both cases with double aggravation and success. Wiser, therefore, on every account, had it been in those, who have so lately crowded the throne with their panegyrics on a *faultless* constitution, if they had tempered the furiousness of their zeal with the soberness of such a caution; but such is the disease of the day, such is the persecution of the present moment, that whoever ventures to express himself to this effect, especially, if he should presume to point out many egregious errors, which have long existed both in church and state, and which are still suffered to exist, it

is then that he is directly reviled, although in general terms approving of the constitution, as the friend of republican rioting and levelling principles* ; and on the other side, if he resolutely opposes, as every good citizen ought, all *violent* attempts at reform, he is then accused of being the advocate of despotism and tyranny.—That our form of government, in the three

* The learned and worthy Bishop of Landaff, in a late excellent Charge to the Clergy of his Diocese, leaves it to the decision of candid minds to say which of the two manifests the greater zeal for the good of his country, the man who discovers an earnest anxiety to have such rotten parts of our constitution as daily invite the attack of its enemies, removed, or he who endeavours to conceal them both, under an idea that the crash will not happen in his day.

estates of King*, Lords, and Commons, is the admiration of the world, none but its enemies will cavil against. It is the first of all, and leaves behind, at an angry distance, the proudest competitor for fame !—but what then ? Are we for this reason, to make a long and lazy halt, and,

* The kingly office, amidst all the pomp and splendour which are essential to the dignity of government, is truly no enviable one. It would be considered by the subject as a most intolerable restraint on his natural liberty, if he were not allowed the choice of his own wife; but in this respect, for the public good, royalty itself is limited ! Nor can the king, without the leave of parliament, quit his own dominions. The meanest subject in his territories asks no permission but his own. The king is, besides all this, through the vicissitude and importance of state concerns, exposed to those
watching

and, *merely because of being foremost*, refuse to advance on to greater excellence, and more unexceptionable renown? Every genuine Briton would loathe the pigmy thought! His jealous and laudable pride would fancy he either saw

watching anxieties, which are happily unknown to the most toiling peasant! With justice, therefore, did king Antigonus say of his crown, "O! crown," said the king, "more noble than happy, if men knew how full thou art of cares and dangers, no man would take thee up, though he should find thee in the streets."—This consideration, if it stood alone, should serve to increase the affection of every humane and good citizen to that sovereign, who, like unto our own, sways his sceptre in justice and in mercy, and whose other acknowledged virtues have at no time deserved the pitiful aims of sarcasm, or the more malicious ones of falsehood and detraction,

or

or heard the emulative steps of his presuming enemy, and that alone would fire his impassioned soul to beat a quicker march.

With precautions such as these, nothing could shake the pillars of the British constitution; for like to the book of truth itself, it would then stand on a rock, and might triumphantly defy, if such could be found, all its enemies! So brilliant an epoch as this for the peace, the exultation, and the happiness of the present, as well as future generations, is still within the grasp of moderation and legal authority! Would to God that this were the immediate moment of its glorious accomplishment. The tongue
 .of

of sedition might then prate in vain, and the clamour of discontent, if able to procure the medium of sound, could only repay the obligation with its echo.

But it is our interest to wait for this national jubilee, not with presaging doubts, or invective murmurings, but expect it with a dutiful confidence, and hail its very dawn with gratitude and loyalty, more perhaps than at first may be suspected; for the acceleration, or the delay of so desirable an event, depends on the peaceable or the refractory deportment of individuals themselves; for it never can be to the honour or to the advantage of the state we live in, obsequiously to give up to the appeals of its citizens, because,

in such a case, the state must yield to their opinion, either from a consciousness of her own errors, or through a passive acknowledgment of their better discernment, or else the triumph of success is liable to be claimed by the power which demanded it, and the danger as well as the degradation of submitting, though but in one instance, to such an ascendancy, might be quoted at pleasure, and resorted to at caprice.

The legislator, it ought not to be supposed, *wilfully* keeps back from gratifying the public wish. There may be reasons, very prudent ones too, of which the community are not apprized for deferring so momentous an undertaking, and which,
if

if revealed at all, might be detrimental to the very object sued for.

The ministers of the crown are seldom so regardless of popular approbation, as to let slip a favourable opportunity of obtaining it; but any unwarrantable stride in quest of it, they are very sensible, is guarded against, by a responsibility, and in some instances by the success of their measures; but when the public, by improperly interfering, by anticipating what is the duty of ministers, and precisely how they ought to act, if such intrusions do not materially discourage their zeal, they fail not to weaken the meritorious effect of it, when exercised. It might not therefore be acting unwisely to

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leave every *new* minister, for a *reasonable* time, perfectly uncontroled in his official career, for the express purpose of affording him an opportunity of becoming a *volunteer* in all his excellencies, and suffering him to shine in the political hemisphere of the world, as a self-blazing star. The experiment appears at any rate to be worth a trial,

To these considerations many others might be urged as an apology for such imperfections as yet remain in our constitution. To press for their amendment when the state is grievously burthened with concerns from within and without, far from being patriotic, wise, or generous, would rather betray a temper of revenge,
of

of cowardice, and persecution. When *greater* matters are at stake, *all* with *one* heart and *one* voice, deprecate the thought of bending the mind to *smaller* ones; but here, let it not escape remark, and *pointedly* should it arrest the attention of the legislator, *most solemnly* does it adjure and *warn* him not *presumptively* to *defer* till to-morrow, what may be his *duty* to do to-day.

Riot, and all the horrors of domestic uproar, are more easily *prevented* than *appeased*. If then these things are *truly* known, and on tides of *human blood* the information is brought, woe be to the man who *heeds* it not. Gradual improvements it is rightly said, are more to be depended
on

on than those which are sudden; if the legislator therefore appears just at this time, to advance with slow and deliberate steps, to remove the more objectionable parts of our constitution, let us rest satisfied that such circumspect pauses are convey'd by the inestimable advantages of wisdom and certainty, and seem to augur eventual good.

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